



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., sends condolences to widow of the late Pro Rodeo great, World Champion Jim Shoulders, 79

Navajo cowboys mourn passing of great competitor, teacher, friend

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., has sent condolences on behalf of the Navajo Nation to the wife and family of the great rodeo cowboy Jim Shoulders of Henryetta, Okla., who died on Wednesday, June 20. He was 79.

The President told Sharon Shoulders that it was with great sadness that the Navajo Nation and he had heard of the passing of her husband last week. He said Mr. Shoulders “was a true inspiration, a true cowboy, and a true friend to the Navajo people.”

“Jim was beloved by many but especially the Navajo cowboys and cowgirls he came to know over the many years of visiting the Navajo Nation,” the President wrote. “He became a fixture at our Navajo Nation PRCA rodeos and was adored by many who appreciated his talents, gifts, try, can-do spirit and incomparable success in rodeo.”

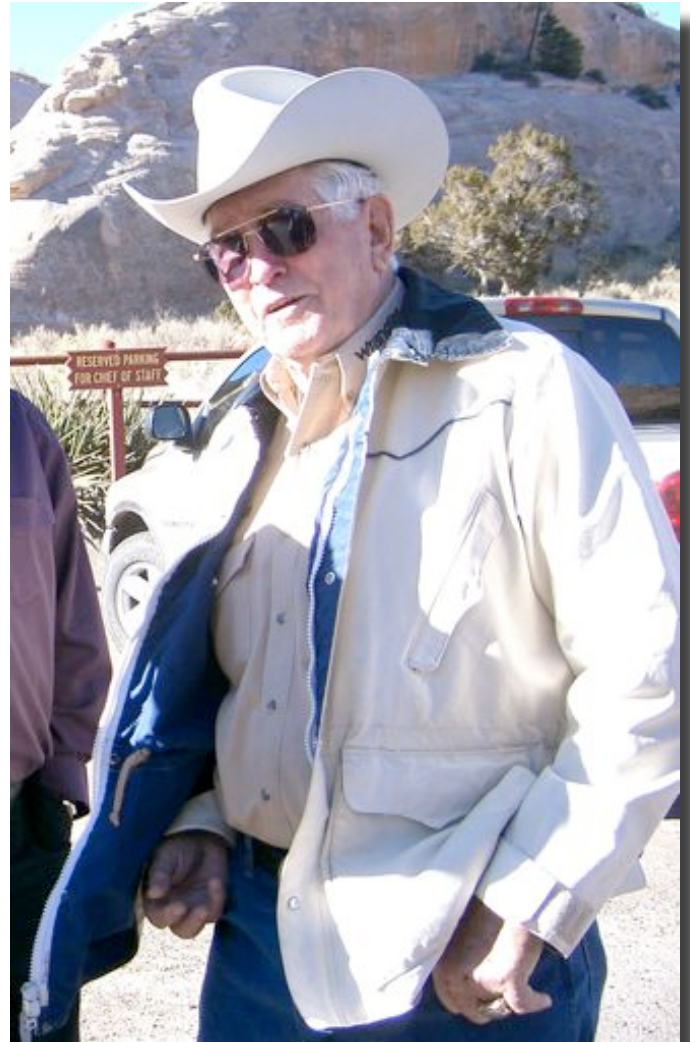
Funeral Services were scheduled for Sunday at the Jim Shoulders' Living Legends Arena Nichols Park in Henryetta. Representing President Shirley and the Navajo Nation was Ken Peterson, director of the Navajo Division of General Services.

Over the years, many Navajo cowboys attended his rodeo school in Oklahoma to learn the rodeo riding trade from the legendary cowboy himself, the President said.

“Jim showed our people great respect and love, always stopping to visit and talk, and generously sharing an autograph and photo with his Navajo admirers here,” he said.

Beyond the rodeo press, Mr. Shoulders' passing was reported in large and small newspapers around the country. The New York Times said he was “a city boy who gained renown as the Babe Ruth of professional rodeo.”

“Babe Ruth was once felled by a celebrated ‘bellyache,’ but he was hardly in the same league with Shoulders when it came to



The late Jim Shoulders in Window Rock in 2005

bodily mayhem,” the paper reported.

“They hadn’t invented concussions when I was still in rodeoing,” Mr. Shoulders told The Daily Oklahoman in February. “Back then, you just got knocked out and they poured water on you and drug you out of the arena and let you come to. I had a few of them.”

Rodeo announcer and Mr. Shoulders' long-time friend Clem McSpadden of Chelsea, Okla., said, "The biggest tree in the rodeo forest has fallen. Even in coming generations, I don't think there will be a hero as strong as Jim Shoulders."

Seven-time world rodeo champion and heir to the Shoulders' crown Ty Murray said, "I got hit in the face with (the news) this morning" when he read of Mr. Shoulders' passing.

"He's been a guy that has inspired quite a few generations of cowboys, the right way in my mind. He was really cool, a hell of a neat old cowboy, and he will be missed."

The only thing more remarkable than Shoulders' sheer accomplishments was the will it took to achieve them, the Tulsa World reported.

"He was probably the toughest guy I ever saw," former world champion bull rider Donnie Gay told the World while in Tulsa for the Jim Shoulders Great Western Weekend in May 2006.

Time magazine chronicled the damage done to Shoulders' 145-pound body – the broken arms, legs, ankles and collarbones – in a piece it ran in 1957. Said Mr. Shoulders at the time: "Shucks, I've never been hurt seriously."



Sharon and Jim Shoulders, a legend in rodeo, visit with Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and First Lady Vikki Shirley, in November 2005 as they travel through the Navajo Nation on their way to Las Vegas, Nev.

"I learned to heal quickly, because if you didn't compete, you didn't get any money," Mr. Shoulders said during his honorary Tulsa weekend in 2006. "I read in the paper where a guy gets turf toe and can't play baseball. If he skinned his toe in rodeo, he would starve to death."

Mr. Shoulders earned \$18 in his first rodeo at the age of 14, not long after taking up the sport in rural east Tulsa, his birthplace. He graduated from East Central High School, married Sharon, his wife of 60 years, and set out for the rodeo at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Apart from being a charter member of the ProRodeo Hall of Fame in Colorado Springs, Mr. Shoulders was also inducted into the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Edmond, Okla., and is the only rodeo cowboy honored in the Madison Square Garden Hall of Fame in New York City.

Because of his success as a rodeo cowboy and his larger-than-life persona, Mr. Shoulders worked as a spokesperson for many corporations through the years in addition to working as a stock contractor.

He represented Wrangler from 1948 until the time of the death, had a long association with the Justin Boot Company and was featured in a highly successful Miller Lite "All Star" advertising campaign on television and in print ads.

The Shoulders have been Henryetta, Okla., ranchers since 1951 and had partnered with their only son, Marvin Paul, in family ranching operations in recent years.

Mr. Shoulders is survived by his wife, Sharon; his son Marvin Paul; daughters Jamie, Jana and Marcie; brothers Marvin, Joe and Bob; six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

"It goes without saying that his Navajo family will miss him, as will yours, and that it may be a long time before we know another true cowboy friend like the great Jim Shoulders," President Shirley told Mrs. Shoulders. "Our prayers will be with you and your family. On behalf of the Navajo people, and the hundreds of Navajo cowboys who knew him, I offer my deepest condolences to you and your wonderful family."